



2.23.16

Welcome to Wheeling Island Hotel, Casino, and Racetrack, and good afternoon. It is my honor to serve as your Mayor of Wheeling and my special privilege to deliver my 7th and final State of the City address. I look forward to this opportunity to share the positive progress happening in our city, and I appreciate Vice Mayor Gene Fahey's suggestion of making this event an annual tradition.

I want to start by saying thank you:

Thank you to the City of Wheeling Police and Fire Honor Guard for presenting our national and state flags.

Thank you, Father Ondeck, for leading today's invocation.

To my fellow City Council members – Vice Mayor Gene Fahey and Councilors Gloria Delbrugge, Herk Henry, Don Atkinson, Ken Imer and David Miller – thank you for your leadership and service to our community.

I want to recognize City Manager Robert Herron, who, earlier today, presented City Council with a balanced budget of approximately \$33 million.

I'd also like to recognize City Clerk Janice Jones; City Solicitor Rose Humway-Warmuth; Finance Director Jill Willey; Economic Development Director Nancy Prager; Public Works Director Rusty Jebbia; Police Chief Shawn Schwertfeger; Fire Chief Larry Helms; Marketing Specialist Allison Skibo, and all the city staff members who are here today. I, along with City Council, appreciate your hard work and dedication to the citizens of Wheeling.

As Vice Mayor Fahey noted, there are several elected officials here with us today. We appreciate and recognize your dedication to our City, County, and State.

On a personal note, I thank my family, especially my wife Carrie, for your continued support, and my three boys, Austin, Levi, and Quinn.

20 years ago, I was a young man with an interest in politics. I was driving down Chapline Street listening to the radio and heard that no one was running for the State Senate. I always had an interest in running for office and decided to put my name on the ballot. Two decades later, here I stand in front of you. My single goal was, and still is, to make West Virginia and the city of Wheeling great again. My hope was to give the next generation an opportunity to stay in Wheeling that didn't exist when I graduated from college.

Over the years, our city has had its up and downs, just like any community. But what has happened in Wheeling over the last eight years is simply remarkable. Had you asked people in 2008 what Wheeling would look like in 2016, few would have expected

all the achievements and changes that have happened. I believe it takes a strong team – made up of City Council, the City Manager, City administration, and community partners – dedicated to making Wheeling a great city. Together, we're creating an environment for success, and we're seeing investment and involvement like never before.

While I wouldn't want anyone to think I'm taking credit for any or all that has happened, it has been great to be a part of the progress. I can assure you that if the business community did not have faith in the direction of the city and Wheeling City Council, they would not be investing in our city. Orrick, Williams Lea Tag, Wheeling Hospital, OVMC, WesBanco, Panhandle Cleaning and Restoration, Sledd Co, and many others would still be growing and prospering, but not necessarily here – not in West Virginia and definitely not in Wheeling. It wouldn't be happening if they didn't feel that the City "gets it." They see that we're creating a pro-growth environment and investing in the future. Simply put, we're moving the city forward, and these businesses are moving with us.

That brings me to this year's first honoree. A few months ago, we made one of the largest development announcements in the Downtown Wheeling's history. **The Health Plan** is coming home to Downtown Wheeling. Not only does this bring up to 400 more jobs to West Virginia, it brings a capital investment of about \$15 million and a new office building to our downtown – something that hasn't happened in over 30 years. I want to take a moment to thank Jim Pennington, his leadership team, and the Board of Directors for choosing Wheeling and making this possible. The Health Plan could have moved or expanded anywhere, but they chose to invest and relocate to Downtown Wheeling. Mr. Pennington, thank you for your trust, your commitment, and your faith in the city of Wheeling. I believe your leadership will inspire continued investment and opportunity for our city.

Over the last 8 years, the City has addressed controversial issues head-on, and we got results. We invested \$31 million in a state-of-the-art water plant; reduced B & O Tax; right-sized the City workforce from 420 to 380 employees while increasing pay; streamlined the building permit process; invested in the Capitol Theatre; realigned our safety services; repealed the two police officer per car ordinance; bought and cleared the 1100 block – the future home of the Health Plan; developed J.B. Chambers Memorial Recreation Park in East Wheeling; and completed a \$1.1 million renovation project at Market Plaza.

One of our main responsibilities as elected city officials is to work with the City Manager to ensure the financial viability of city government, to balance our budget and deliver the most efficient and effective city services possible. As cities across the country struggled from the recession, Wheeling began struggling with the same financial pressures. However, City Council conducted a top to bottom review of the organization and made

the difficult and right choices to keep the City on strong financial footing. That has been accomplished, as last year's budget finished comfortably in the black. As a result, we were able to invest in our employees, infrastructure, and paving at record levels. These outstanding choices continue to pay dividends as we continue today with a strong financial outlook.

Vice Mayor Gene Fahey recognized that without fixing the pension crisis, we would not be able to continue to operate our city. We worked with the Wheeling Fire and Police Departments to find a long-term solution for employee pensions. In doing so, we made it possible to keep the city budget on the right course. I can't overemphasize enough the positive impacts these decisions will have on the future stability of our city.

Home Rule has played an important role in our accomplishments. Home Rule has been and will continue to be one of the best pieces of legislation to pass in Charleston. When decisions are made in Wheeling, for Wheeling, it allows local citizens to have a voice and be involved at the local level.

Under Home Rule, the City of Wheeling created the Vacant Building Registration Program. A total of 382 buildings have been registered since 2008, with 179 currently on the list. These are property owners that we're holding accountable. As a result of the program, many of the buildings have been sold, repaired, or demolished. Some of the buildings are now homes or have been adapted for reuse by a small business.

An example of the progress with formerly dilapidated buildings is the site of the J.B. Chambers Memorial Recreation Park. Since the 1960s, East Wheeling and its neighbors have struggled with declining property values because of dilapidated and vacant structures. Now, East Wheeling is transitioning. The support of dedicated residents and investments by the J.B. Chambers Memorial Foundation, Jim and Linda Bordas, Wheeling Hospital, and the Schenk foundation are making the progress possible.

During a dedication ceremony at the recreation complex, George Bajpayee summarized the project from his point of view as an East Wheeling resident for almost 40 years: "The J.B. Chambers Memorial Recreation Park is not just a sports complex. It signifies much more than that. The project required leadership, foresight, careful planning, and investment. It required our community to come together to work for a bigger goal. The sports complex represents everyone's hard work, dedication, and belief that we all deserve to live in a neighborhood where we can proudly and safely raise our children and grandchildren." I think he summed it up perfectly.

My next honoree is a man whose name is synonymous with generosity in Wheeling – **Dr. Darrell Cummings**, pastor at the Bethlehem Apostolic Temple in North Wheeling. At Easter, Dr. Cummings is there with Easter baskets. At the start of the school year, he's

there with school supplies. He's there with food for Thanksgiving dinner and Christmas gifts in December. And any day of the year, he's available for prayer or discussion. He preaches self-empowerment and is truly a man of God. We're fortunate that God sent Dr. Cummings to Wheeling. Dr. Cummings, thank you for being my friend and for your unwavering generosity to our community. We look forward to the work you'll do with the new community center in North Wheeling.

My tenure as Mayor has given me the opportunity to work with great people within the City offices. When you don't see the day-to-day activity in local government, you may not realize how fortunate we are to have dedicated, hardworking city employees. Many of the departments have been involved with the accomplishments I've listed so far – the pension process, vacant building registration, the new water plant – but the buck stops at City Council. Without a dedicated, open-minded City Council, none of the advancements and changes that have been made could have happened. Former members of City Council and former Mayor Nick Sparachane helped to lay the foundation for some of what this City Council has accomplished. I'm very proud that we made the tough decisions that needed to be made.

Today, I especially want to thank Councilwoman Gloria Delbrugge for 12 years of service, and Councilman Herk Henry for 16 years of service to the City of Wheeling. You have seen this city change a lot during your time in office, and I want to thank you for your support over the last eight years, in particular, for helping us move the city in the right direction. Councilwoman Delbrugge and Councilman Henry, thank you for your service to the taxpayers and citizens of the City of Wheeling.

For years, we've talked about the need for housing in Wheeling, particularly downtown. We've spoken to many developers about the opportunity for housing in our core business district. In 2015, thanks to the Woda Group, we announced two large residential projects for Downtown Wheeling. Jeff Woda and his team announced the Stone Center Lofts project in the spring and had tenants moved in by fall. Woda's \$2 million investment created 22 loft apartments in the Stone Center. In September, we announced an additional \$13 million investment by the Woda Group into the Boury Lofts, which will bring 77 new market rate apartments to our downtown. Woda will soon offer nearly 100 new and upscale apartments. These projects, along with their other investments in the city, will continue to be a driving force in the redevelopment and repurposing of buildings in our downtown. Thank you to Jeff and the Woda Group for your significant investment in Wheeling.

There are so many exciting projects, thriving companies, and success stories in Wheeling right now that it would be impossible to highlight them all. And we can't overlook the smaller entrepreneurial investments in restaurants and retail and the quiet work that's happening out of the spotlight. It's important that we remind ourselves of

what makes Wheeling great. It gives us countless ways to refute negativity and misconceptions about our city.

We have longstanding organizations celebrating milestone anniversaries, like Crittenton and OVMC. More housing is popping up with Welty Village and Capital Greene. Higher education is thriving, as Wheeling Jesuit University and West Virginia Northern Community College continue to grow. Local students are bringing statewide and national attention to Wheeling with their success, including Wheeling Jesuit's volleyball team, Wheeling Central's hockey team, West Liberty's men's basketball team, and the football, cheering, and speech teams at Wheeling Park High School. We're also proud to continue serving as the host city for the Super Six.

Businesses are expanding and renovating, including the Hampton Inn, Good Shepherd, Panhandle Cleaning and Restoration, Wheeling Hospital, Carpet Showcase Flooring Center, and our host today, Wheeling Island Hotel, Casino, & Racetrack. Improvements to beautiful buildings like the Kaley Center by Kalkreuth Roofing, the Laconia, and the Flat Iron Building are enhancing our downtown.

Another great reuse of a historic building is the old Fort Henry Club. **McKinley & Associates** purchased the Fort Henry Building and is giving it new life as an office building. The firm has invested a tremendous amount of money into stabilizing the pre-Civil War building. Renovations include a new roof, window restoration, new elevators and ADA Accessibility upgrades, with plans to reconstruct the front porch and renovate the interior spaces. An interesting fact is that one-third of the building is already occupied. Isn't that wonderful? The Fort Henry Building is once again becoming a prominent downtown fixture, thanks to McKinley & Associates. Thank you to Ernie Dellatore, Mike Price, and everyone at McKinley and Associates for your investments in Wheeling and for ensuring the Fort Henry Building has a bright future.

Things are alive and growing all around the city, including more new housing than we've seen in the last 50 years. Last year alone, 1,188 building permits were issued for a total construction investment of \$37 million. On Wheeling Island, we saw street paving and sidewalk repairs, new docks for public safety, and the preservation of the Gene Long floodwall. In South Wheeling, we invested in additional paving and improved the traffic flow. In Woodsdale, we saw the investment and growth of Linsly and Wheeling Country Day School. Warwood gained new businesses in the plaza and Warwood Commons and will soon have new tennis courts. Sledd Co. and Cardinal Health are growing in Elm Grove, while new businesses like Auto Zone and MedExpress opened their doors. Officials worked together on the relighting of I-70 and the turning lane project on Kruger Street in Ward 6. In East Wheeling, we saw revitalization and new investment in housing, and for the first time in decades, we're seeing hope and new people moving

into the neighborhood. A special thank you to Bishop Bransfield and the Wheeling-Charleston Diocese for their continued investment in their campus in East Wheeling.

A few blocks away, an iconic Wheeling building is benefiting from the investment of **Pat and Mary Ellen Cassidy**. Not only is Pat is one of Wheeling's leading attorneys and a walking history book, but he and Mary Ellen are demonstrating their faith in Wheeling in a very visible way. Over the past two decades, they have been working to restore the First State Capitol of West Virginia and the past home of the Linsly Military Institute. While the interior has been beautiful for a while, Pat and Mary Ellen have now invested their time and energy into the exterior of the building. If you've not seen it lately, you must drive by on Eoff Street and see how wonderful the building looks. I know that Mary Ellen is particularly proud of the solar panels on the roof of the annex. Pat and Mary Ellen couldn't be there today, but I want to recognize them for their continued dedication and investment into our community and the First State Capitol Building.

Wheeling has continued to grow to be the entertainment center of the Ohio Valley. Thanks to our venues like the Capitol Theatre, WesBanco Arena, and Heritage Port, we can bring world-class entertainment to Wheeling. Names like Seinfeld, John Mellancamp, and the Doobie Brothers have lit up our marquee. We made a commitment to focus more on the arts, culture, and history with the creation of the Wheeling Arts and Cultural Commission. Public art is growing in Wheeling, from painted parking meters to a steel elephant at the Heritage Park and Sculpture Garden. The new Fallen Firefighter Memorial statue will soon stand at Heritage Port, thanks to the generous support of Wheeling Hospital and other donors.

Under Kurt Zende's management, Centre Market continues to be a solid anchor for arts, local retail, and specialty foods, giving the Ohio Valley a unique place for entrepreneurs to be part of the scene. You can come downtown to attend Broadway shows and enjoy our very own Wheeling Symphony. With us today is Maestro Andre Raphel. Thank you for your continued energy and hard work to make the Wheeling Symphony the best that it can be and for providing our community with accessible quality entertainment. Thanks to the Wheeling Symphony, you've all received vouchers to attend one of their concerts.

The schedule at Heritage Port seems to get better every summer, with events like the Chili Cookoff, Wheeling Arts and Culture Fest, Italian Festival, Mountaineer BrewFest, BluesFest, Vintage Raceboat Regatta, Dragon Boat Racing, Augusta Levy Color Me Au-some 5K, Debbie Green 5K, and the Ogden Half-Marathon, to name a few. And when Heritage Port is quiet, the Wheeling Nailers are getting fans fired up at the Arena. Honestly, if you can't find something to do in Wheeling, come talk to me.

Over the weekend, more than 10,000 attendees filled WesBanco Arena for Monster Jam, and the response to the renovations was amazing. With a new video board

system, seating, concessions options, and the exterior transformation, going to the Arena is a completely different experience than it was just a year ago. Your investment is making it all possible. This \$7.4 million project will help us keep and attract new shows, conferences, and events, which translates to more people in our restaurants and hotels, spending more money in our city.

Like never before, I think collaboration is so important in a thriving city, and I'm very proud of our strong partnerships. The City, Wheeling Convention and Visitors Bureau, Wheeling Chamber of Commerce, Regional Economic Development Partnership, Wheeling National Heritage Area Corporation, and Ohio County Commission are working closer than ever before. The openness in the dialogue, the support, and the joint effort is essential to the continued revitalization of the city of Wheeling and the Ohio Valley.

While many people in our community do great things, not many have done as much as **Robert Fitzsimmons**. That's why he is the **2016 Community Spirit Award recipient**. Part of what makes Mr. Fitzsimmons special is that he never asks for any publicity or recognition. He quietly helps and invests his time, money, and energy into making Wheeling great. For instance, when you go to Warwood, Bob's home area, you see a very nice signs that say "Welcome to Warwood," and in very small print at the bottom, it says "Donated by the Fitzsimmons Family." His generosity may be quiet, but Bob is quite famous for his work as an attorney, with widespread recognition for his role in national cases and most recently for the movie *Concussion*. Bob is a leading investor in our community, particularly in downtown and with the recently named Fitzsimmons Family Dog Park. I personally want to thank him, his wife Sonny, and his children, Sen. Rocky Fitzsimmons, Clayton, and Kayleen. Your gracious efforts as a corporate and civic leader have truly impacted our community.

Over the last year, we have welcomed several new leaders into our community or to new leadership roles. Oglebay Resort, West Virginia Northern Community College, West Liberty University, Bethany College, and WesBanco all have new leadership. I think that creates an opportunity for new thoughts and to strengthen our relationships to work together for a stronger Wheeling.

As we move forward in our city, we will still need to make significant investments in infrastructure, including roads, bridges, sewers, and water systems. The city is committed to investing our revenue from sales tax into the needs of our community. That revenue is making it possible to purchase new equipment and invest in infrastructure like never before. We must continue to make smart financial decisions, even when those decisions create controversy, because we know it is in the best interest of our residents. We must continue to facilitate an atmosphere where housing opportunities exist for new and current residents. We'll continue to create a better

business environment so entrepreneurs and companies will invest and bring jobs to Wheeling.

Part of Wheeling's continued success is based on our diverse workforce. Our local economy is a mix of healthcare, education, banking, back office operations, the service industry, and oil and gas. This gives us of the unique ability not to be tied to any one industry. While we embrace the opportunity that oil and gas brings to our community, we need to continue to have a diverse economy.

Quality of life is vital to both population growth and economic development. We're fortunate to live in a very safe community with full-time police and fire services. I'd like to congratulate the Police Department's 2015 Officer of the Year, Cpl. John Stipetich, who's currently training a new officer. With exams coming up for both firefighters and police officers, we look forward to more employees joining our safety forces this year.

Our strong education system also enhances our quality of life, with great choices for public, private, and parochial schools in Ohio County. I'd like to take a moment to recognize someone that I've had the opportunity to work with and see first-hand her dedication to the students of Ohio County Schools. Dr. Dianna Vargo, thank you for your hard work and leadership. I wish you much success in your future endeavors.

What's my wish for the future of Wheeling? I believe in a few years, I'll look back and see a new Wheeling; a progressive city; a place that embraces its history but isn't afraid of a new future. We'll continue to be a leader in health care and education. We'll be financially strong because of the hard choices we've made, and that will position us for better opportunities. Our downtown will continue to thrive and transform more and more each year. New structures are going up next to historic buildings, making Downtown Wheeling architecturally rich with the old and new. This year, the City and State will collaborate to further improve our downtown with a complete streetscape renovation. It will be the largest revamp of Downtown Wheeling since the 1970s. Much like I hoped 20 years ago, Wheeling is becoming a place where young people want to stay and invest. Or in the case of the "Boomerang Generation," young people are leaving home but coming back with new ideas and a renewed energy to make our city better. Wheeling offers something you can't find in big cities – the chance for people of all ages to play an active role in shaping our future.

I know that the future of Wheeling is bright. Great things are just starting. There is still much to do, but we must stay positive. Don't let the naysayers have the last word. They revel in failure. With only a few months left as your Mayor, I believe the city is in good hands. I look at the future with people like Gene Fahey, Don Atkinson, David Miller, Ken Imer, Robert Herron, Don Rigby, Craig O'Leary, Frank O'Brien, Erikka Storch...with these people involved, the best is yet to come for Wheeling.

I'll end today as I began: by saying thank you. Thank you for allowing me to fulfill a lifelong dream. Thank you for allowing me to be your State Senator. Thank you for allowing me to be your Mayor! Thank you for the 20 years you've allowed me to be involved. Hopefully, West Virginia and Wheeling are a little better from my involvement. Most of all, I thank Carrie, my wife. Thank you for sharing my time and energy and for always being my biggest supporter.

To all of you, thank you for being here today, and thank you for your dedication to Wheeling. God Bless you and our great city.